

Supporting Social Connection

Encouraging belonging and authentic interaction



bright path
THERAPY

Bright Path Therapy

CBT informed support for children and young people

This resource is for information and reflection. It does not replace personalised therapeutic support.



Social connection looks different for every child

Social development is not one size fits all.

Some children:

- Prefer smaller groups
- Need longer processing time
- Find unstructured social time difficult
- Communicate differently
- Experience social fatigue quickly

Differences in communication are not deficits.

“Belonging matters more than fitting in.”

For some children, social interaction requires significant mental and emotional energy.

They may:

- Appear confident at school but exhausted at home
- Need extended recovery time after social events
- Mask differences in order to fit in
- Struggle more after busy days

Social fatigue is not a lack of resilience. It is a sign that energy has been used up.

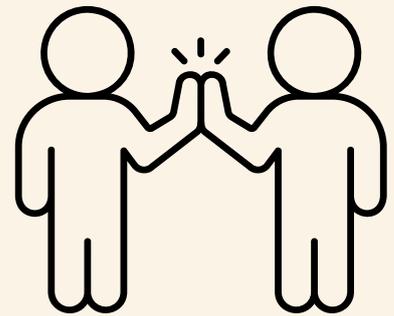
What Can Make Socialising Hard

Masking and social effort

Some children learn to hide or suppress their natural behaviours in order to fit in socially.

This might include:

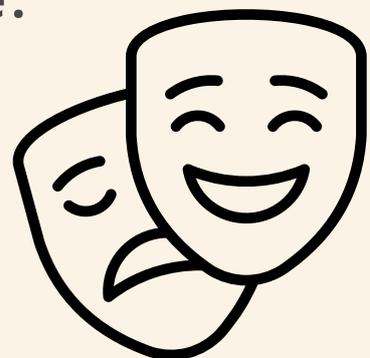
- Copying other's behaviour
- Forcing eye contact
- Suppressing stimming
- Rehearsing conversations internally
- Constantly monitoring how they appear

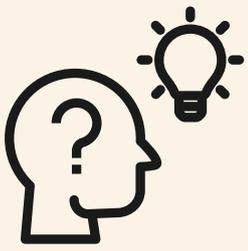


Masking can make a child appear socially confident, while internally feeling anxious or exhausted.

Over time, masking can increase:

- Fatigue
- Emotional overwhelm
- Irritability at home
- Loss of self-confidence





What Can Make Socialising Hard?

Children may struggle socially when they:

- Feel uncertain about unspoken rules
- Are managing sensory overload
- Are masking throughout the day
- Feel anxious about making mistakes
- Have experienced rejection

Social difficulties are often linked to stress, not lack of motivation.

Children who have experienced:

- Rejection
- Bullying
- Social misunderstanding
- Repeated correction
- Being told they are “too much” or “too quiet”

May approach new social situations cautiously. Whilst the social hesitation can be protective, building trust in social settings often takes time and repeated positive experiences.

**Confidence grows through safety,
not pressure**



Supporting Social Confidence

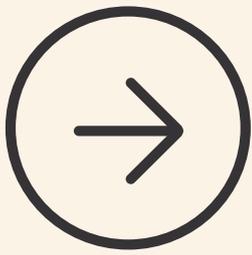
Helpful Approaches

- Prioritise one or two safe friendships rather than large groups
- Offer structured social opportunities
- Debrief gently after social events
- Support recovery time after busy days
- Model and explain social expectations when helpful

Approaches to Avoid

- Forcing eye contact
- Over-correcting harmless differences
- Comparing to peers
- Treating social skill development as performance





Next Steps

Social confidence develops gradually, not through pressure.

It may feel useful to seek additional support if:

- Social distress is affecting school attendance
- Anxiety is increasing around friendships
- Your child feels isolated or withdrawn
- You feel unsure how to support without increasing pressure
- Masking appears to be causing exhaustion
- You feel unsure how to balance encouragement and protection

Early collaborative support can reduce stress and build confidence gradually.

If you are considering whether therapeutic support may be helpful, a FREE 15 minute initial consultation can provide clarity. You are welcome to get in touch via the details below to arrange a conversation. There is no obligation to proceed following.



WWW.BRIGHTPATHTHERAPY.NET



HELLO@BRIGHTPATHTHERAPY.NET



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